

Strange Brew

Words and music by Eric Clapton, Felix Pappalardi, and Gail Collins, from the Cream recording *Disraeli Gears*



“Strange Brew,” the opening track on Cream’s 1967 album *Disraeli Gears*, is a 12-bar blues in the key of A. This is a great key for standard-tuning fingerstyle arrangements because the root notes of the three major chords in the key—A, D, E—are all open strings. Many of the chords—like the two D chords in measure 2—are fingered up the neck, which allows for string-bending vibrato where the strings are more supple.

An important technique in this arrangement is the percussive backbeat, indicated by an X in both the standard notation and tablature. This driving, snare-drum-type sound is produced by the strings bouncing off the frets. To do this, bend your picking-hand wrist back a bit, then bring your fingertips and the side of your thumb sharply down onto the strings they are about to pick, or onto the strings just picked to mute them. It

is important that you land with your fingertips (not your knuckles) on the correct strings, so that you are immediately ready to pick the next notes. Most of the percussive sound will come from the bass strings bouncing off the frets. If you wear fingerpicks and/or a thumbpick, this technique will be difficult (and dangerous for your guitar), so try it without them.

I wrote a new bass line for this arrangement, and the opening phrase (measures 1–2) uses a common harmonic device called “contrary motion,” in which two lines move in different directions. In this case, you’ll notice that as the melody descends, the bass line ascends. Measures 13–24 are an improvisation. The new melody alters the notes of the original, but largely maintains the rhythm. Notice that the opening melodic phrase ascends (measure 13), where the original descended. I return to the original melody at the “strange brew” lyric (measure 21), then end with a repeat of the closing riff from measures 11–12, played an octave higher.

—MARK HANSON

Verse

♩ = 112

A7 D7 A7

D7 A7

Em D7 A7 E7

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Improvisation

Musical notation for improvisation, measures 13-17. Chords: A7, D7, A7, D7.

Musical notation for improvisation, measures 18-21. Chords: A7, Em.

Musical notation for improvisation, measures 22-26. Chords: D7, A7, E7, (A7), C7.

Verse

Musical notation for the start of the verse, measures 27-30. Chords: A7, D7, A7.

27 1. She's a witch of trou-ble in e - lec - tric blue — In her own mad mind she's in
2-3. See additional lyrics.

Musical notation for the verse, measures 31-35. Chords: D7, A7.

31 love with you — with you — Now what you gon - na do —

Musical notation for the verse, measures 36-40. Chords: Em, D7, A7, E7.

36 Strange brew kill - in' what's in - side — of you — 2. She's

Chords



1. She's a witch of trouble in electric blue
 In her own mad mind she's in love with you, with you
 Now what you gonna do?
 Strange brew, killin' what's inside of you
2. She's some kind of demon messing in the glue
 If you don't watch out, it'll stick to you, to you

- What kind of fool are you?
 Strange brew, killin' what's inside of you
3. On a boat in the middle of a raging sea
 She would make a scene for it all to be ignored
 And wouldn't you be bored?
 Strange brew, killin' what's inside of you

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